

## **Conflict Prevention in the Tajik-Kyrgyz Border**

*Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan*

*Elona Klaa-Zakharova, Tajikistan – MSW, Columbia University School of Social Work (International House New York)*

*Salkynai Samatova, Kyrgyzstan – MSW, Columbia University School of Social Work (International House New York)*

### **SECTION I**

**Project Goal:** The overall project goal is to prevent cross-border conflicts by empowering the local population living on the Tajik-Kyrgyz border to advocate for their human rights through increasing their legal awareness on the rules and regulations of border-crossing and by enhancing their conflict resolution skills. To achieve this goal, training sessions were conducted for those bordering communities on the rules and regulations of border crossing and methods of conflict resolution. The project implementation was essential since the establishment of multiple border and customs checkpoints after the collapse of the Soviet Union, disputes between the Tajik and Kyrgyz people over territory and natural resources, and conflicts between the border and custom officials and local population, negatively affect the communities' socio-economic well-being, complicating their access to education, health care, and other social services.

**Funds:** In addition to the Davis Projects for Peace grant, the project team members obtained \$ 4000 USD co-funding from the Open Society Foundation. Additional funds will be used for the implementation of the project follow-up activities, organization of the round-tables with the project stakeholders, and printing out and disseminating the project materials to other regions where the issue still exists.

**Project Details:** Original plan to implement the project was to organize joint training sessions for Tajik and Kyrgyz people. However, crossing the border with the group of people requires governments' official permission, the process is very long and can take from one to three months. Thus, as joining the participants from two countries was impossible at that moment, the decision was made to split the funds and organize separate training sessions in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

The project was divided into 3 phases and officially started on June 1, 2011.

Assessment and Preparation phase was devoted to meeting project stakeholders, analyzing current situation and main problems existing on the Tajik-Kyrgyz border, and identifying the most conflict-prone regions as target areas. Based on the meetings and consultations with our project stakeholders, Isfara Hukumat (the Executive Body of Isfara region) in Tajikistan and local authorities in Kyrgyzstan, who enormously helped us during the project implementation, we identified the target areas. As a result, bordering Vorukh, Chorku, and Surh villages from Isfara region, Tajikistan, and bordering Maksat and International villages from Leilek region, Kyrgyzstan were selected as the project target areas.

Project Implementation phase: When all the administrative and logistic arrangements were finished we moved to conducting the training sessions that were scheduled for June 25 in Tajikistan and August 13-14 in Kyrgyzstan. In both countries, the training sessions were composed of three complementary parts: (a) problems and conflicts in the Tajik-Kyrgyz border, (b) border-crossing rules and regulations, and (c) conflict resolution and management. The trainings were very interactive. The participants expressed a great interest in the issues discussed and took active part in discussing various topics, brainstorming, and working in small groups. According to the participants, such type of training is very important for the cross-border community to maintain security in their lives, but, has been rarely provided by local/international organizations. The main difficulty in carrying out the training was, as is often the combination of a lack of time with a desire to provide participants with the greatest possible amount of useful information.

Evaluation phase: The participants evaluated the training as timely and very useful. They stated that as a result of the training, they improved their knowledge about the rules for crossing the Tajik-Kyrgyz border, which will facilitate their movement across the border. The participants also learned about the roles of emotions and skills in conflict management and increased their knowledge about methods and ways of resolving conflicts. In addition, the training participants from both sides expressed their appreciation that provided training sessions and handout materials were in their own languages (Tajik and Kyrgyz).

**Project Short-Term Impact:** The training benefitted 25 people in Tajikistan and 42 people in Kyrgyzstan including men and women aged 17-65 from different levels, such as representatives of local authorities, Isfara Hukumat, local businessmen, customs officers, teachers, representatives of local/international non-governmental organizations, and residents bordering target villages.

**Project Long-Term Impact and Sustainability:** For achieving the project visibility and sustainability, the project flyers were prepared in 4 languages: English, Tajik, Kyrgyz, and Russian, which were distributed among the project participants and stakeholders. The participants also received the hand-out packages, including

presentations and copies of laws and normative acts on border crossing. The training covered the aspect of the importance of spreading the knowledge received to other people and encouraged the participants to distribute the hand-outs to other community members. The project team members will also follow-up the project by continuing to cooperate with local authorities of target regions and local organizations, and will send them additional flyers and information sheets so as they also take part in spreading the word to other regions where the issue still exist. These actions will benefit a larger number of communities who experience similar problems. Generally, the project definitely has the future, because its uniqueness lies on the fact that its focus is on working directly with the community members who are eager to make a change in their lives. All the project participants were unanimous in their opinions that the project should expand to other regions and involve the representatives of both Kyrgyz and Tajik sides in the future.

## SECTION II

**Defining Peace:** Peace and security are essential for a harmonious existence, therefore, to us, peace is the feeling of calm, safety and security.

**Project's Contributions to Peace:** The bordering communities of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan suffer from the difficulties associated with the cross-border movement, strained relations between the border guard services, and a gap between ethnic divisions and political boundaries. The lack of awareness of the population on the related laws and their rights, and inadequate conflict resolution and management frequently lead to conflicts and violation of human rights. These factors also threaten the security and coexistence of people and their livelihoods, as well as undermine peace at all levels. The project played a central role in preventing conflicts and promoting peace in the Tajik-Kyrgyz border of the Ferghana Valley, because it raised the awareness of people about their human rights with regard to border crossing and educated about modes of conflict resolution and management. The project participants agreed that *"the best way to co-exist together for residents of border villages on both sides is to cooperate and manifest mutual understanding, as well as develop the inner sense of tolerance"*. In the short-term, the project efforts will greatly contribute to mitigating the tension between the border soldiers and local population, and facilitating movement across the borders; in the long-term we hope it will contribute to social stability and security in the Tajik- Kyrgyz border.

### **Project's Impact on Us and Lessons Learned:**

*Elona Klaa-Zakharova:* The project greatly contributed to my personal and professional development. It allowed me to apply my social work skills that I have gained throughout my study at CUSSW. It has convinced me once again that before initiating any development activity, *listening* first, is fundamental to building a relationship with communities. People may not always know where to start, but involving them from the beginning will allow for a better understanding of their goals and aspirations. In this way, you can be sure that your activities are aligned with their idea of a useful activity. The project also made me understand that it may be very difficult to change a system on a macro level, but starting to address the human problems on community and grassroots levels might be a good solution that can lead to a positive change. Alinsky (1989) said that *"people understand things in terms of their experience"* (p. 81). As a result of the project, I learned that community projects should communicate within the experience of audience and reflect the wishes of the people who are directly affected by community problems. Community projects should help to bring out many voices to add collective power and strength to an issue. The Davis Project for Peace was valuable because it was not only responsive to the community needs, but also helped the community residents develop the skills necessary to address their own issues. On a personal note, I can say that *"I believe in power of communities, and encourages people to help community to discover and recognize their forces (values, beliefs, and resources they possess), and empower them to use these forces to improve their lives"*.

*Salkynai Samatova:* Although I worked in the bordering regions before, my experience of working with the current project target communities motivated me to further work closely with communities and connect them to local authorities to ensure that their voices are heard. At the same time, I feel happy that I contributed to their empowerment to solve their problems as a community utilizing learned set of conflict-resolution skills. In general, building the peace in the cross-border regions requires a long-term intervention. Because of the growing tendency of cross-border trade due to the use of pastures, water and land resources, cross border conflict prevention still remains one of the main concerns in the region. Since there are still border territories in dispute, cross border villages need to have strong community-based structures and active participation of local populations and authorities in addressing problems. The project participants found the provided models and set of skills on peace building through training sessions very effective. Therefore, the achievements should be further consolidated and training models should be replicated to other near border villages.

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**During the Training on Rules and Regulations of Border Crossing and Conflict Resolution Skills**



**Coffee Break: the participants have rest and interact with each other**



**Group picture with the project participants**

